

Mental Health Liaison Group

February 17, 2009

The Honorable Richard Durbin
309 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

The undersigned national organizations of the Mental Health Liaison Group are pleased to write in support of the Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act, important legislation that will assist colleges and universities in successfully addressing the growing mental health needs of campus communities.

According to research done by Columbia University, almost one half of college age students suffer from mental health disorders, including addictions, but less than one in four are seeking treatment. Further, a 2004 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Report entitled, "Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Suicide in College and University Settings" noted that major life transitions, such as leaving home and going to college can exacerbate existing psychological difficulties and trigger new ones. It further notes, "leaving family and peer supports to enter an unfamiliar environment with higher academic standards can deepen depression or heighten anxiety." Finally, the 2007 National College Health survey found that 43.2% of students reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function" and 61.5% reported "feeling things were hopeless." Unfortunately, many colleges and universities are ill-equipped to address the mental health needs of their communities.

In an effort to address these serious problems that can lead to academic failure or in the most extreme case, suicide, The Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act aims to maximize the likelihood that students who require mental health treatment receive it and to ensure that their problems do not reach that crisis level before services become available. To achieve this, the bill establishes grants to eligible colleges and universities to foster a comprehensive approach to campus behavioral health issues, including promotion of mental health, prevention of behavioral health disorders, expanding campus mental health services and mental health training, education and outreach, and developing and disseminating best practices to other colleges and universities.

The legislation also calls for the establishment of a national public education campaign, focusing upon mental health and behavioral health on college campuses. Such a campaign would assist in improving the understanding of mental health and mental disorders, and serve to encourage help seeking behaviors.

We applaud your efforts to ensure that those students with mental and behavioral health problems get the support they need through the Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15th Street, NW, #1212, Washington, DC 20005

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We look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work
Child Welfare League of America
CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild
Eating Disorders Coalition
Emergency Nurses Association
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders – ANAD
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
National Mental Health Awareness Campaign
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA)